

Public Policy 701: A Call to Action to Prevent Climate Change

Christopher Corbett

Albany, New York

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Purpose of Session

This Session supplements Public Policy 601: Climate Change and Grassroots Advocacy* presented at SCRA 2017, Ottawa, and is a **Call to Action** for intervention by Community Psychologists at *individual* and *community* levels (Corbett 2018).

Whereas Public Policy 601 addressed: the Paris Agreement, the transition from monopoly to competition and customer choice; and policy intervention at local level, this Session's focus is intervention at *individual* level, recognizing the most effective advocates for RE energy are by those that use it themselves.

Also, new RE opportunities have expanded in many states, namely *Community Solar*-- which opens the door to more socio-economic classes, including those who rent-- and RE often costs less than traditional utility service.

* Available at <http://scra27.org/files/7015/0282/6078/Corbett-SCRA17Final2PublicPolicy601ClimateChangeGrassrootsAdvocacy61617.pdf>.

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Another Benefit of Renewable Energy

While not widely understood, another benefit is that RE options empower citizens to escape mandated electric service, and potentially all sunk costs including the transportation, as utilities are now government mandated to offer RE options.

The effect is to take the utility out of monopoly control of both supply and distribution-- enabling customers to escape those costs. *Utilities typically thwart this market development as they lose control.*

Once customers are empowered to shop for their electric supply, they not only create environmental and often economic benefits— *but they are no longer held hostage to monopoly utility service.* This change in the marketplace puts utilities in competition with other energy suppliers— *benefitting all customers by granting them the power of choice-- along with the ability to “walk”.*

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What Justifies a “Call to Action”?

The consequences of climate change endanger communities globally. Community Psychology’s stated **values** clearly justify a “Call to Action”:

Those values include:

- * concern for health and well-being of all members of community
- * concern for harmful environmental conditions
- * commitment to *prevent* disorder and promote psychological health
- * commitment to help *organize and empower* citizens
- * *research* on environmental conditions, impact on health and well-being, and *action* to help citizens & officials improve those conditions to produce significant social change [p. 4-7]*

* Heller, Price, Reinharz, Riger & Wandersman (1984). *Psychology and Community Change*. Dorsey.

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Why Should Community Psychologists Rise to the Many Challenges of Preventing Climate Change?

Beyond these **values**, the Field's **core competencies** train CPs to be strong community advocates and very well equipped to help prevent Climate Change.

Those core competencies include:

- * **Empowerment (# 2)**
- * Community Inclusion and Partnership (#4)
- * Program Development, Implementation & Management (#6)
- * **Prevention and Health Promotion (#7)**
- * Community Leadership (#8)
- * Community Development, Organizing & Advocacy (#13-14)
- * **Public Policy Analysis, Development & Advocacy (#15)**
- * **Community Education, Info. Dissemination & Building Awareness (16)**

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Why Should Community Psychologists Rise to the Many Challenges of Preventing Climate Change?

Given Community Psychology's **values** and **core competencies** of the Field, CPs are most highly suited to combat climate change.

Specifically they are trained in, and well equipped to engage in:

- * grassroots advocacy and intervention
- * empowerment & citizen participation
- * policy intervention especially at local level
- * 2nd order change, all in the name of *prevention*-- to prevent and mitigate further damage to the environment and promote the health and well being of communities.

This is the wheelhouse of Community Psychologists— given their **values, training** and **skills**, there could hardly be a better match.

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What Roles Can CPs Play to Prevent Climate Change?

The UN Paris Agreement* call for *all governments* and *all sectors of society* to act urgently to cut greenhouse gas emissions, strengthen climate resistance and support the most vulnerable in adapting to climate change, presents enormous challenges.

As described, the **values** and **core competencies** of the field of CP are highly aligned with implementing the goals of the Paris Accords.

Community Psychologists are very well positioned to respond with many roles and opportunities to improve the environment and advance the public welfare, in the battle against climate change.

* On October 5, 2016 crossed the final threshold of approval by majority of nations bringing the Agreement into effect 11/4/16; www.un.org

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What Roles Can CPs Play to Prevent Climate Change?

Given their values and skills, many roles for CPs include:

1) Policy Change and Intervention

- * advise/intervene at national/federal level
- * advise/intervene at region/state level
- * advise/intervene at local level (town, village)
- * monitor existing policies for efforts to unwind
- * research policies/legislation from other regions
- * draft model policies where lacking (local level)
- * build relationships with relevant elected officials
- * educate policymakers: Op-Eds & Letters to Ed.

2) Citizen Participation

- * model renewable choice yourself
- * network at neighborhood level
- * organize at local level (town/village)
- * empower citizens with education
- * educate citizens on their right to exercise customer choice of RE through Op-Eds & Letters to Editor
- * advocate for low income & seniors

Note: Op-Eds and Letter to Editor are under both categories as their contents are structured for very different *audiences*, with the interests of *Policymakers* and *Citizens* often conflicting.

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What Roles Can CPs Play to Prevent Climate Change?

Of those *Policy* and *Citizen Participation* roles, the focus of this Session is on *Citizen Participation* roles including:

- * modeling renewable energy choice yourself
- * intervention, education and empowerment at the neighborhood and local level
- * promoting availability and awareness of *Community Solar* to expand more RE options across socio-economic levels including low income and senior populations
- * for a focus on *Policy* roles, see Public Policy 601 (Corbett 2017) presented at SCRA 17, Ottawa on SCRA's website at:

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How Can CPs and Citizens Exercise and Model RE Choice?

Both Federal and State policies-- and their economic incentives, have created a wide variety of RE options available in many states.

For example, 40 out of 50 U.S. states mandate “net metering”* rules to increase solar energy production (Freitas & Weis 2017). These policies **unwind the utility “monopoly”** in favor of “competition”, enabling customer choice.

This has created many RE options for consumers and allows customers to “bypass” the public utility for energy supply by obtaining their own. While RE Choice is a *right* of nearly all customers, *many do not know it.*

CPs and citizens can model RE choice, for example, by “going solar”.

* Net metering allows customers to generate more energy than they need and bank the excess for future use.

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How Can CPs and Citizens Model RE Choice? Go Solar

Commonly offered Residential solar/RE options include:

1. purchased systems
2. leased systems
3. purchased power agreements (PPAs)
4. marketer or ESCO contracts (Energy Service Companies)
5. community solar

Yet, “going solar” is easier said than done. For many citizens it is a most challenging decision to make.

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Why is the decision to “go solar” so challenging?

Under historic, monopoly regulation, residential customers were completely excluded from participation and decision making. Renewable energy decision making (RED) is complex and requires customer understanding of costs and rates. It often requires risk of capital, signing contracts and navigating federal, state and local tax incentives.

Many residential customers, especially low income and seniors, are not well positioned to make such decisions. Yet they often have RE options as well.

The need for education and empowerment is very high and their lack blocks the critical path to choosing RE. Also, citizens are now ripe for exploitation that comes with competition, choice and RE.

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Why is the decision to “go solar” so challenging?

There is keen need for citizen *education and awareness* of RE opportunities to enable informed decision making.

Yet the **for-profit sector**, namely energy marketers, are ill-suited to perform the *education and awareness* role as their bias is for profitmaking, and potentially, exploitation. There is also the trust issue: citizens are skeptical of marker claims. Public utilities are similarly ill-suited as *increased RE reduces their own sales and monopoly power*.

The **government sector** is not well situated as education is not its forte; its goals are focused on policy to meet political goals, not always what is best for RE consumers. Finally, partisan politics by state often undermines historic climate change policies that promote RE.

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Why is the decision to “go solar” so challenging?

With **for profit** and **government sectors** not well suited, that leaves a void ripe for *community psychologists* and *nonprofit sector* to fill, such as nonprofits, cooperatives & advocacy groups to perform education and awareness roles to empower informed RE decision making by citizens.

To perform education and promoting awareness roles, advocates need be familiar with key factors necessary to make an informed choice, and ideally are RE consumers themselves.

The most effective educators and advocates for renewable energy will be those that use it themselves. This could be at *individual level* such as with purchased systems; leased systems; purchase power agreements (PPAs), ESCO contracts or at *community level* through community solar.

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Why is the decision to “go solar” so challenging?

Choosing between the various options is a matter of individual choice and varies depending upon one’s values and circumstances.

The most practical and common RE choices include solar panels on customer premises, or located in the community. Residential solar is on rooftops or pedestals and *community solar* are often located on industrial rooftops, brownfields or farmland not in use.

Purchased systems, leased systems and PPAs require rooftop or pedestals on homeowner property whereas *community solar* may be located where rights have been purchased or on leased property.

Recent expansion of *community solar* in many states has opened up renewable energy choices for almost all citizens regardless of income level, including renters and condo owners who do not own their rooftop.

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What Factors and Values Help Inform Renewable Energy Decision making?

There are many key factors relevant to informed decision making such as:

- * environmental values (save the planet)
- * lowest lifetime cost
- * known cost per KWh
- * aesthetic concerns
- * monthly bill savings
- * zero out of pocket cost
- * roof/pedestal panels Ok?
- * maint./repair obligation

[You could think of this as a very complicated equation.]

Yet some consumers want carbon free energy and are willing to pay more than utility supply, others require cost savings. Many consumers benefit the environment and reduce their energy costs.

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What Factors and Values Help Inform Renewable Energy Decision making?

[Handout-Breakout]

There are tradeoffs among RE options. Some advantages and disadvantages may help resolve the decision:

- 1) **Own System:** advantages- lowest cost, tax credits; increases value of house
disadvantages- requires upfront cost; responsible for repair/maint.
- 2) **Lease System:** advantages- monthly savings; no upfront cost; no equipment resp.
disadvantages- less savings than owning; ~ 20 year contract resp.
- 3) **Purchase Power Agmt:** advantages- monthly savings; no upfront cost; no equipment resp.
disadvantages- lower savings than owning; ~ 20 year contract resp.
- 4) **Marketer/ESCO:** advantages- open to renters; no upfront cost; no equipment responsibility
disadvantages- often higher cost than utility; requires negotiation skills
- 5) **Community Solar:** advantages- ideal for renters; shaded homes; no equipment responsibility
disadvantages- low cost savings though sometimes guaranteed

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Community Solar is expanding in many jurisdictions

Residential customers often have solar access and various solar options, whether they own or rent. Solar panels can be added to many rooftops or installed on a pedestal. Or purchased power is an option.

Where not desired or feasible, Community Solar is another option and growing in availability. With “Community Solar”, citizens sign up for a portion of the production. Some programs guarantee the cost will be lower than utility supply.

This opens renewable energy to more socio economic classes as it includes renters and condo owners who may lack capital or do not own their rooftop. This is essentially a “community partnership model” that involves government to the benefit of all (Rubin, E. 2019).

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Community Solar is Expanding in Many Jurisdictions

While there are variations, following are common features.

Community Solar

- * if approved by locality, developer builds solar farm (or other RE source)*
- * customers sign up to obtain a portion of the production*
- * developer incurs or finances the cost of construction*
- * customers are entitled to a specified amount of RE*
- * developer typically receives tax benefits and RE incentives*
- * customers bring new RE supplies to grid but financial benefit limited*
- * some developers will guarantee a lower cost than utility supply*
- * caveat: some solar farms risk NIMBY opposition by local officials & public*

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Community Solar is Expanding in Many Jurisdictions

- * community solar is often structured open to all income levels
- * New Jersey recently became the 20th state to offer CS (Rubin 2019)
- * NJ's community solar is open to renters, condo owners and homeowners alike for a three year pilot basis
- * some programs give priority or allocations to low or moderate income: NJ's program reserves 40%
- * CS often designed not to impinge on green space by using brownfields and landfills
- * other states have similar programs

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Community Solar is Expanding in Many Jurisdictions

- * Other states with *Community Solar* include New York State
- * New York's solar partnerships served as model for NJ (Rubin 2019)
- * similarities include program open to anyone who can buy in
- * program aimed at low to moderate-income residents
- * allows tax benefits to private property owners to host a grid
- * other noteworthy programs (Rubin 2019):
 - Colorado: nation's largest CS project for low income residents
 - California: offers grants to nonprofits to advocate for under-represented populations

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Community Solar is Expanding in Many Jurisdictions

- * partnership and co-op models have proven successful and enable community participation working with nonprofits
- * many other states have passed legislation ensuring that CS programs are implemented
- * such states include: MA, VT, ME, RI, CT, DE, MD, NC, SC IL, MN, WA, OR, HI as well as DC (Solstice 2018).
- * states are aggressively addressing climate change despite federal policy retrenchment & withdrawal from Paris Accords
- * CS promotes *advocacy, empowerment* and *community building* by enabling *citizen participation* in the energy marketplace
 - values that dovetail with the values of our Field

[BREAKOUT with handout]

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Advocacy for Low Income Citizen Participation

Given the core values of CP noted earlier, including a concern for all community members, CPs are well positioned to advocate for low and moderate income citizens. That is, to advocate with policymakers to consider the circumstances of these populations.

Many barriers are identified by Durkey & Cleveland (2016, p. 1):

- * large capital requirements
- * low credit scores
- * lack of access to tax credits
- * residence in mfg. housing
- * limited access to financing
- * lack of home ownership
- * residence in multi-family housing
- * lack of roof access

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Advocacy for Low Income Citizen Participation

As noted by Durkay & Cleveland, there are many strategies policymakers can use to mitigate these barriers including: grants, financing programs, capping interest rates, aggregation programs for multi-family housing and other policies for low and moderate income consumers which are implemented at the state levels (p. 1-4).

A valuable role exists for Community Psychologists interested in low and moderate income citizens who could advocate at the state and local level for such programs and/or conduct related research. Case studies of programs in California, Colorado, Massachusetts and New York are described by Durkay & Cleveland (p. 3-4) provide a valuable starting point for CPs interested in advocacy for such populations.

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Conclusion

There is an urgent need for “boots on the ground”, community psychologists-- and citizens have critical roles to play.

For citizens, most states have already created RE options, shifting to citizens *the responsibility for their energy choice*. Five RE options often include: owning solar, leasing solar, PPAs, ESCO contracts, and community solar in many jurisdictions. Citizens now have many RE choices-- *yet, education, awareness, empowerment and low income advocacy are sorely needed now for those state level policies to succeed.*

For community psychologists, opportunities exist and roles abound. Roles include: modeling renewable energy choice yourself; educating and promoting awareness at the community level; writing letters to editor and Op-eds; drafting model policies where needed; and researching best practices from model jurisdictions to name a few.

Given the Field's values and core competencies-- CPs are highly suited to enable and support citizen participation in RE choice. What roles, if any, will you consider and will you join the battle to help fight climate change?

Public Policy 701: A Call to Action to Prevent Climate Change

Notes:

1. On June 1, 2017 newly elected President Trump stated the United States will withdraw from the UN Paris Agreement. While the impacts are unknown at this time, according to Kortenhorst (2017), the UN Paris Agreement is expected to endure. He also notes the US is the leading emitter of greenhouse gases on a per capita basis (p. 2).
2. This workshop has limitations in that it reflects primarily a U.S. or developed world perspective. McKibben (2007) is highly recommended to provide a fuller view including the impacts on lesser developed nations. To illustrate, he states:

“If we Americans can use less coal and gas and oil, we’ll in effect free some of the atmosphere to absorb the carbon that the poor world must emit to meet basic needs. And, we should do more than that: having become rich by filling the air with our effluents, we should share some of that wealth with the developing world in the form of aid and technology. You can even put a number on how much money we are talking about. If you value carbon at current rates, each American owes the rest of the world between \$273 and \$1,086 a year for the privilege of polluting more than our fair share.” (p. 197, fn. omitted)

Public Policy 701: A Call to Action to Prevent Climate Change

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